

# Puritans (But no Pilgrims)

*Historical Theology*

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Who were the Puritans?

What were some of the most important issues for Puritans?

How did Puritans try to change the Church of England?

Which movements/people worked against the Puritans?

Introduction:

What is "adiaphora"?

>Things indifferent or non-essentials

>Let's not divide over non-essentials

>It's okay to do the non-essentials if that is required by the system

>Puritans had a problem with the adiaphora or the non-essentials

## I. Puritanism Review

### A. Basics of Puritanism

1. Wanted to rid the Church of England of practices and doctrine that was unbiblical
2. They wanted to "purify" the church
3. No longer: Clerical vestments, sign of the cross in baptism, kneeling at communion, remove church organs, reduce number of holy days

### B. Some history of Puritanism

1. Some work when Henry VIII was king
2. Strong reforms under King Edward
3. Many martyred under Queen Mary and many went into hiding
4. Those exiled, returned when Elizabeth became queen

## II. Puritanism Gains Influence

### A. Controversy during Elizabeth

1. Queen Elizabeth required compliance in forms of worship
2. Appointed the Archbishop of Canterbury, Matthew Parker to force obedience
3. Ministers must wear the white wide-sleeved gown
4. Thomas Sampson and Laurence Humphrey refused, saying the people of their congregations would be confused--think they were Catholic.
5. Thirty-five more ministers refused to wear the vestments
6. Parker suspended the "rebels" from preaching and stopped them from being paid
7. All but Sampson and Humphrey decided the fight was not worth it.
8. They appealed to the great reforming in Zurich: Heinrich Bullinger
9. Bullinger shocked them by advising that the vestments were ok and that if the church authorities called for them, then they should be worn.

### B. Two main types of Puritans in the 1570's

1. Avoid the controversies
  - a. They felt like that the fight over some practices were just not worth it.
  - b. They believed that the fight over practices like vestments was anarchy and sinful
  - c. Included in this camp was Humphrey (see above) and John Foxe (Book of Martyrs)
2. Wanted reform by changing the Parliament
  - a. This type of Puritan did not want to cause a ruckus
  - b. They believed they could make changes in organization through persuasion in preaching

c. They grew in number and in influence.

d. One of the great preachers and writers in this group was Henry "Silver-Tongued" Smith.

In his book Smith, *God's Arrow Against Atheists*, argues that Christianity is **the only true religion**. He battles paganism, Islam and Roman Catholicism, and demonstrates why each of these is not only self-defeating, but a lie of the devil. He quotes from numerous sources with dozens of footnotes and eloquently, as the silver-tongued preacher that he is, reduces all arguments against God, Jesus Christ and the Bible to absurdity. This is a classic work that should not be missed!

C. Anglican Presbyterians

1. Wanted Presbyterian form of church government (felt it was the only biblical way)

2. Presbyterian church government calls for elected representatives of the congregation called Elders, or Presbyters (from the Greek word: πρεσβύτερος presbyteros), to lead the local body of believers.

3. They also wanted to change the Anglican confession of faith

a. Did not like the Book of Common Prayer

b. Wanted worship to look more like what was found in Scottish, Dutch and German Reformed Churches.

4. They did not want to leave the Church of England, just make big changes

5. Thomas Cartwright (professor of divinity at Cambridge)

a. No vestments

b. End the clerical hierarchy of bishops—each local minister is the highest office and all ministers are equal

c. Quit the superstitious practices of:

(1) sign of the cross at baptism

(2) fasting at Lent

(3) bowing at the name of Jesus

d. Each congregation should choose their minister

6. The Presbyterians took their ideas to Parliament through William Strickland (Parliament member and former explorer) and a pamphlet called the *Admonition*.

7. Elizabeth was furious that reforms were attempted by going to Parliament since she was the head of the Church of England. (These struggles planted the seeds that sprouted English Civil War 80 years later)

III. Struggles and Schisms

A. Education

1. For Puritans, ministers were to be biblically well-educated.

2. Several colleges were strongly Puritan: Cambridge, Christ's College, Saint John's College, Trinity College and Emmanuel College

3. Cambridge used the "conference" method developed by Zwingli and Bullinger. Lecturers met with the students to study the Bible together. Each participant had a specialty: Hebrew, Greek, history, logic,...

B. Conferences in the Churches

1. The conference idea was utilized in local churches

2. Clergy would discuss a text or theological subject.... Congregation would listen

3. Almost all of these conferences were held with the blessing of the regional bishop

4. Elizabeth did not like the conferences.... too much local control.... Too much like democracy

5. Elizabeth appointed Archbishop Grindal to end the conferences. He was not a Puritan, but he was Reformed in theology.

6. Grindal did not want to end the conferences, just make sure they studying the Scriptures and not criticizing the Church of England.

7. Grindal wrote a letter to Queen Elizabeth (see Needham 4: pages 197-198)

8. Elizabeth did not like the content or the tone and suspended Grindal. Grindal was placed under house arrest.

9. Six years later, when he was nearly blind, he was allowed to do his duties as an archbishop. (he died within the year)
- C. Presbyterian movement (the Classis movement)
    1. Classis is another term that means presbytery
    2. It was a ground movement to change the structure of the church to Presbyterian. It gained popularity for several years, but lost spectacularly.
    3. One of the movement's leaders proposed a bill in Parliament to change the form of government for the Church of England.
    4. But only a few voted in favor, even most of the Puritan members voted against it.
  - D. The Unfortunate Result of the Defeat of the Spanish Armada
    1. Spain's great fleet was directed to England by King Philip II
    2. A storm and the English navy destroyed the fleet
    3. With Catholicism no longer a great threat, the Anglican leaders did not see any reason to ally with the Puritans.
- VI. A New Monarch and Royal Line
- A. The death of childless Queen Elizabeth brought in the Scottish King: James
  - B. James' beliefs on salvation were Reformed, so the Puritans were hopeful
  - C. One thousand ministers out of the nine thousand in England signed a petition
  - D. They wanted the usual changes:
    1. Ditch the clerical vestments
    2. Don't use the sign of the cross in baptism
    3. Don't bow at the name of Jesus
    4. No wedding rings (Most Puritans believed jewelry was sinfully frivolous)
    5. Remove the word "priest" from the Prayer Book
    6. No one should pastor more than one church, and all pastors should preach
  - E. James agreed to and presided over a conference
    1. The conference included Archbishop Whitgift, nine other staunch Anglicans, and four moderate Puritans.
    2. The conference was almost entirely friendly
    3. James agreed to a list of moderate reforms
    4. None of the reforms were carried out as Whitgift died within the month and the new Archbishop, Bancroft, refused to implement them.
    5. In fact, Bancroft imposed new rules on worship, church government, and doctrine.
    6. With these new terms, hundreds of Puritan ministers were removed and driven into exile.
  - F. One change that was not on the agenda of the Conference
    1. James agreed to a new translation
    2. Whose idea and why would James agree to new English translation?
      - a.
      - b.
      - c.
    3. James appointed 47 scholars that represented several Anglican brands of Protestantism
    4. The King James translation used Tyndale's work—80% of the N.T. is Tyndale's
    5. The King James Version was released in 1611, but for the next 40 plus years, the Geneva Bible continued to be the most popular translation in England.
- V. King Charles I and move to High Church
- A. James' Son, Charles was a much different monarch
  - B. Like James, Charles believed in the Divine Right of Kings, but saw no value in working with Parliament
  - C. Charles did not call Parliament into session for many years
  - D. Charles also pushed the Church of England into High Church practices and teachings
  - E. What does High Church mean?

- F. Charles appointed William Laud to the highest Church position.
- G. Laud led the Anglican Church down an unusual path: High Church Arminianism
1. Ceremony, vestments, and sacraments
  2. On the Arminian side: The human will cooperated with the grace that flowed from the ceremony and sacraments.
  3. The Anglican Church now rejected all forms of Calvinism: That man is depraved, dead in sin, and the sovereignty of grace.
  4. To the leadership of the Anglican Church, all Calvinist were Puritans
  5. The new Anglican Church (High Church Arminian) began to look more and more Catholic
    - a. Communion table became an altar
    - b. Moved the communion table/altar to the east side of the church where it had been during Catholic days.
    - c. Worshipers were required to come up to the altar rails to receive communion and they were required to kneel
    - d. Laud took measures to silence Calvinist and Puritan preaching. (people saw this as a move to undo the Reformation)
    - e. People of the time enjoyed hearing biblical based sermons – some preachers were extremely popular. So, having them shut down easily angered many common people.
- H. Charles married a French Catholic, Henrietta Maria
1. The main purpose of the marriage was political. Stronger alliance of England and France.
  2. But her strong Catholicism unnerved many English, especially Puritans
  3. Many English were fearful another Guy Fawkes event might happen
- I. Charles appointed many of the offices of Bishop to High Church Arminians and those who were Calvinist did not speak out against the moves by Charles and Laud
- J. True persecution began to take place and many Puritans left for America.
- K. These are some of the events and activities that eventually lead to the English Civil War

## Conclusion

What are some practices retained from the Catholic Church that Puritans wanted to eliminate?

What are some personal life practices that would have been disapproved or approved by Puritans?

What are the implications or applications for us today?

Just as essential as phonics is for teaching a child how to read, so too the Bible was the sine qua non of Puritan preaching. The Puritans were not just Theo-centric, they were Word-centric. The full-orbed implications of the Reformation maxim sola scriptura were writ large upon the face of Puritan preaching. The lives of the Puritans were uniformly shaped by the revealed will of the Triune God contained in sixty-six books which they believed were divinely preserved for the good of God's people. Accordingly, the Puritans "loved, lived, and breathed Scripture, relishing the power of the Spirit that accompanied the Word. They viewed Scripture as God speaking to them as their Father, giving them the truth they could trust for all eternity." (Reformation 21)

## Sources:

- 1) Nick Needham, *2000 Years of Christ's Power, Volume 4*.
- 2) Online: Puritan Publications
- 3) Online: Grace Reformed PC
- 4) Online: Blue Letter Bible
- 5) YouTube: Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Ryan Reeves, *Puritanism, an Overview*
- 6) Online: Reformation 21